

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, as presently amended and in light of the following discussion, is respectfully requested.

This amendment is in response to the Office Action mailed March 22, 2006. Claims 1-8 and 17-26 are presently active in this case; Claims 9-16 were cancelled by a previous amendment. The present amendment amends Claims 1, 7, 8, 17, 23 and 24; and adds Claims 25 and 26.

The outstanding Office Action rejected Claims 1-8 and 17-24 under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,463,223 to Kojima et al. (herein "Kojima").

Initially, Applicants wish to thank Examiner Arana for the courtesy of an interview granted to Applicants' representative on June 26, 2006, at which time the outstanding issues in the case were discussed. Claim amendments and comments similar to the ones developed hereinafter were presented and the Examiner indicated that in light of the amendments and comments, the amended claims appear to overcome the cited references.

To clarify the claims, independent Claims 1, 7, 8, 17, 23 and 24 are amended to recite "wherein at least one of said first or second guide portions is configured to couple directly to an adjoining guide portion of an adjoining process cartridge." This feature finds non-limiting support in the disclosure as originally filed, for example at page 9, lines 17-27 and as shown in Figures 3 and 4. As explained in Applicants' specification at page 10, lines 8-23, with corresponding Figure 4, the claimed invention improves upon conventional devices because the claimed invention eliminates the necessity of the image forming apparatus to have a member for guiding the process cartridge in motion or positioning the process cartridge, thereby reducing the space occupied by the process cartridges and the overall size of the image forming apparatus.

Turning now to the applied prior art, Kojima discloses guide rails 201 positioned in between process cartridges B.¹ Therefore, Kojima does not teach eliminating the guide rails located between adjoining process cartridges in the image forming apparatus. Kojima also does not disclose the advantage of reducing the space occupied by the process cartridges inside the image forming apparatus, and thus the overall size of the image forming apparatus, as taught by the present application. On the contrary, Kojima explicitly teaches guide rails located in between each process cartridge.² The claims as currently written require a contrary structure than in Kajima.

Therefore, the prior art fails to teach or suggest every feature recited in the claims, so that independent Claims 1, 7, 8, 17, 23, 24 and claims depending therefrom are patentably distinct over the prior art. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully traverse, and request reconsideration of the rejection based on Kojima.

Claims 25 and 26 are added by the present amendment. Claims 25 and 26 disclose that *the adjacent process cartridges are positioned within the image forming apparatus on a slope with respect to the horizontal direction*. Support for these claims can be found in the specification as originally filed,³ but were not originally claimed. Applicants believe Claims 25 and 26 contain patentable subject matter, and respectfully request that Claims 25 and 26 be allowed.

¹ See Kojima, column 9, lines 38-42, and Figure 8.

² See Kojima, column 9, lines 38-42, and Figure 8.

³ See Original Specification, Figure 11, and page 20, lines 14-18.

Consequently, in view of the present amendment, no further issues are believed to be outstanding in the present application, and the present application is believed to be in condition for formal allowance. A Notice of Allowance for Claims 1-8 and 17-26 is earnestly solicited.

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